

**PHIL 480: Seminar in the History of Philosophy**  
***Building Moral Character: Neo-Confucianism and Moral Psychology***

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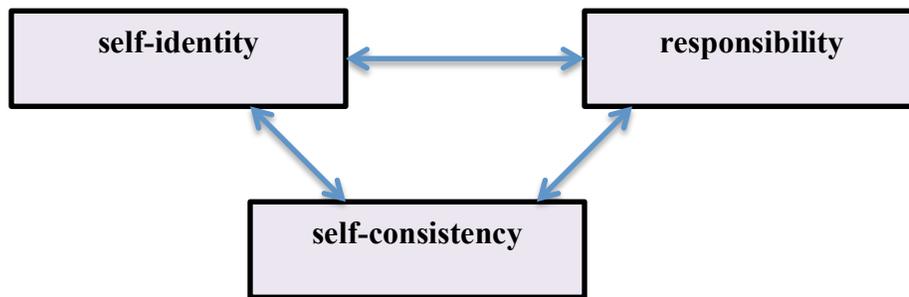
**[Handout #10]**

**Augusto Blasi, Moral Identity: Its Role in Moral Functioning**

**§ Main Theses:**

- 1. Moral identity mediates moral knowledge and practical moral decisions.**
- 2. Hence, the problem of moral action is a question of self-consistency.**

**Three key concepts:**



Moral identity motivates; responsibility stresses the self as the source of moral compulsion, and integrity emphasizes the idea of moral self-consistency, of intactness and wholeness.

**§ The Self Model by Blasi**

**— focusing on the role of the self in moral functioning**

- (1) In some cases, the outcome of moral judgments becomes the content of judgments of responsibility → obligatory
- (2) The criteria for responsibility are related to the definition of oneself.
- (3) The motivational basis for moral action lies in the internal demand for psychological self-consistency
- (4) For the moral action to follow moral judgment, the individual must have the ability to stop defensive strategies from interfering with the subjective discomfort of self-inconsistency.

**Q:** What is the advantage of introducing the concept of moral identity in the scheme of moral action?

**Q:** What are the relations between moral cognition and moral identity?

## § Moral Judgment and Moral Action

One's moral judgments reflect one's general understanding of oneself, other people, social relations, and situations, and this understanding can, and does change as a result of the development of one's intelligence and of richer and more complex experience with the social world.

## § Moral Identity –Moral identity provides a truly moral motive to moral action.

Erikson (1964): Identity involves being true to oneself in action, and is associated with truthfulness with respect to one's own understanding of reality.

McDougall (1936): Moral ideals are powerless if they are not rooted in a moral self.

Morality is more a characteristic of the agent than of either action or thinking; the ultimate source of goodness lies in good will, and good will is at the core of what a person is.

### 1. One forms a theory of the self at an early age.

\_\_ Each individual, begin relatively early in development, has an image, a perception, a scheme, or a theory of herself, which is at the same time a principle of cognitive organization and the source of self motives.

### 2. The self is organized according to some principles of psychological consistency.

\_\_ The organizing principle, varying from person to person, determines the order and the hierarchy among the characteristics that are included in the self.

### 3. One's concept of one's self includes some aspects of the core self .

\_\_ These aspects are so central that one could not even imagine being deprived of them.

\_\_ But the essential self cannot be found simply in what one says about oneself, through the framework of checklists, rating scales, and questionnaires. One would have to uncover the unspoken and sometimes unconscious assumptions behind decisions, one's emotions, etc.

### 4. Identity includes some elements of the ideal self, and functions as the ideal principle of action.

### 5. It is possible that some people's identity does not include morality.

**6. Different people with moral identity will see different aspects as essential to their identity. Moral identity can be looked at as a dimension of individual differences.**

\_\_\_ e.g. one might see compassion as essential while another would see fairness and justice as essential.

**7. Moral identity is developmental: it cannot be found before a certain age, and it can undergo changes in one's lifetime.**

\* Problem: There are no readily available methods by which these hypotheses could be empirically tested.

### **§ Moral Identity and Moral Cognition**

**Q:** Two individuals share the same structure of moral reasoning, make the same moral judgments, but are characterized by a different moral identity, so the first one acts and the second one doesn't. Does this mean that the cognitive dimension is not sufficient to motivate?

\_\_\_ Is it possible to make one's moral understanding alive, full-blooded, animated, and rooted in one's deeper psychological nature without losing in the process of its cognitive characteristics?

#### **View 1: Blasi and Kohlberg**

**Reason is of the essence of morality and cannot be eliminated without destroying the moral phenomenon itself.**

#### **View 2: Freud**

**Morality is anchored in the total personality of the individual – morality is not based on abstract ideals. Moral personality is based on a core of instinct-like impulses (especially hedonistic desire) and their transformations.**

1. The ideal self is one element of the representation of oneself constructed on three things: (i) the admired object (frequently the father), (ii) the ideal child (in imagined perspective of the parents) and (iii) identification with the self with narcissistic gratification.
2. The ideal self is a compromise between the desired instinctual gratification and the need to win the love of, or to avoid punishment from, authority figures.

#### **Blair's critique:**

\_\_\_ At its best, morality cannot be but a form of self-interest. The so-called higher virtues or ideals are but hypocritical and devious maneuvers to serve one's self-interest.

#### **View 3: McDougall**

**Morality is anchored in the total personality of the individual – morality is not based on abstract ideals. Moral personality is based on a core of social impulses and their transformations, esp. the need for social acceptance and approval.**

1. There is a self-regarding sentiment that provides the motivational force for moral action.
2. The self-regarding sentiment is an organized system of emotions and tendencies, a cluster of affects and impulses, centered around the idea of self.
3. The emotions and motives that constitute the self-regarding sentiment are mostly social in nature: admiration, awe and reverence, altruistic feelings and sympathy, and particularly shame and pride, self-respect and self-satisfaction. From these originate the two central motives: search for social approval and avoidance of social disapproval.
4. Moral inconsistency and backsliding result from weak self-regarding sentiment.
5. One acquires abstract moral sentiments (e.g. love of justice, truth, etc.) from absorbing the finer aspects of one's moral tradition, through the admiration of those exceptional individuals who embody them.

**Moral judgments originate from emotions and sentiments, not the other way around.**

**Blair's critique:**

\_\_\_ This theory fails to account for individual defiance against social rulings, and cannot transcend the level of moral praise and blame. The central error of his theory is his assumption that moral judgment is noncognitive and that reasoning is powerless to affect the emotive core of the self.

**The dilemma:** If moral identity is based on natural impulses, egoistic or social, one loses the cognitive basis of morality; if cognition and reason are stressed as establishing moral motives, one risks losing the person as the center of morality. It would appear, then, that the only hope of grounding morality on the essential self without losing morality's reason is to hypothesize **that the self's very identity is constructed, at least in part, under the influence of moral reasons.**

**§ Discussion questions:**

1. Is moral judgment the result of moral sentiment or the other way around?
2. Are people usually motivated to act morally on the basis of their moral judgments or their moral sentiments?
3. How does one's self-identity play a role in moral motivation? Is the self rationally constructed?
4. Blasi points out the dilemma of preserving both moral cognition and rationality on the one hand, and keeping the person as the center of morality on the other. How does he propose we solve this problem? Why can't Kohlberg's, Freud's and McDougall's theories deal with this dilemma according to Blasi? What problems does each theory have and do you think that Blasi's solution solve the dilemma?